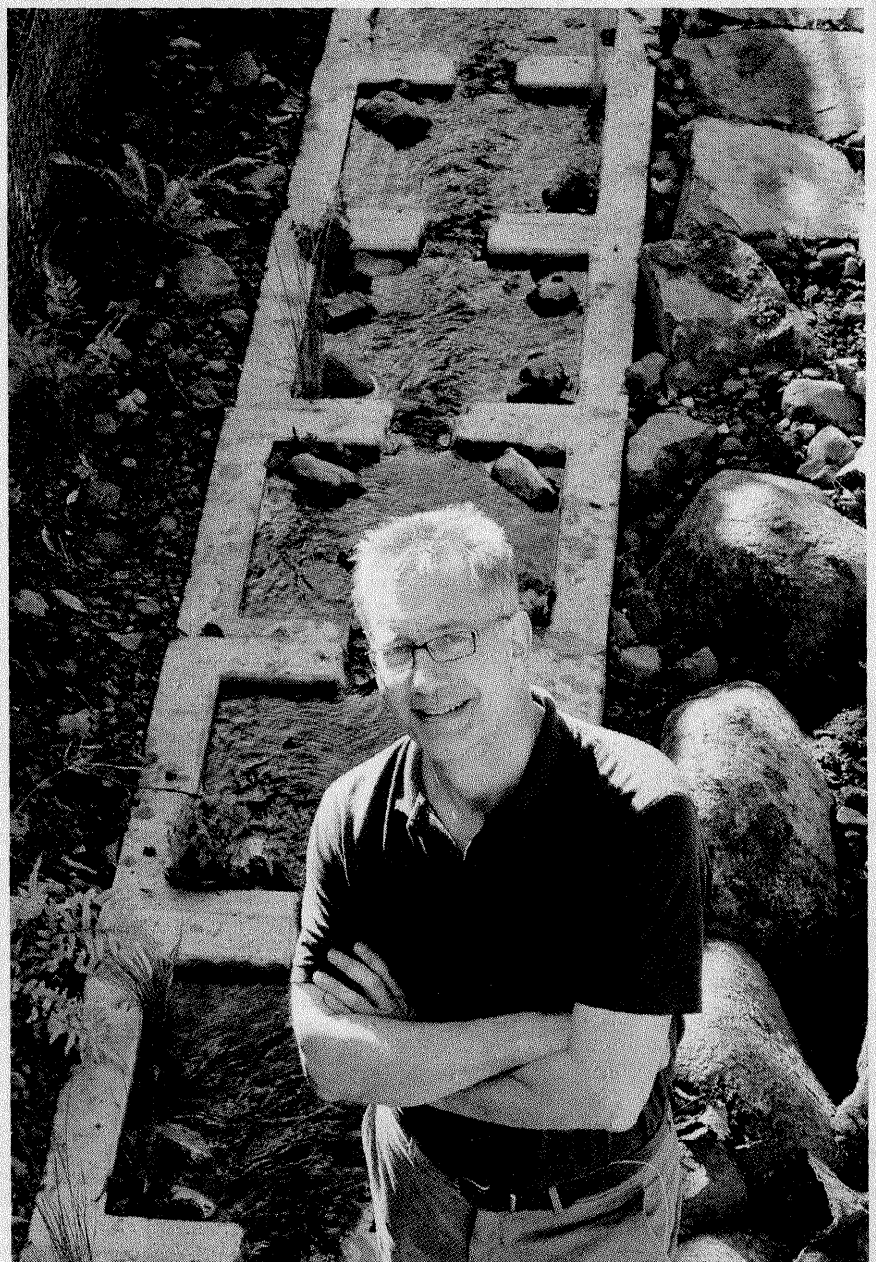

INNOVATION: Professor Peter Davies inspects the new concrete fish ladder he designed for Sandy Bay Rivulet. Picture: KIM EISZELE

Fish forge new path with ladder

MICHELLE PAINE

NATIVE fish thwarted in their mission to swim upstream have been given a helping hand by a unique fish ladder.

Five native species live in or return to the Sandy Bay Rivulet, but small fish can only jump so high and culverts often stop them in their tracks.

The Friends of Sandy Bay Rivulet, Hobart City Council and University of Tasmania Professor Peter Davies teamed up so fish could follow the path set by generations before them.

After trial and error, council staff led by Lynda Bonar had a brainwave and found concrete stormwater pits were the right size and shape.

The fish are three galaxias species – the jollytail or common, the spotted mountain and the climbing, and the freshwater flathead, or sandy.

"Our urban rivulets suffer many abuses, one of which is concrete designed to help the water flow quickly away to the sea during floods, but providing little or no habitat for fish to spawn in. The smooth surfaces also make it more difficult to swim upstream," said Prof Davies, known for his Murray-Darling Basin work.

"It's an elegant and effective solution . . . and can be used in many other urban streams to restore fish populations."

The Friends have been putting plants along the pits to provide refuge for the fish as they migrate up the rivulet.

Fish have already been using the ladder, which is a trial.

Prof Davies was confident fish could now pass upstream without hindrance.